

## Correct type locality of the Emperor Goose (*Chen canagica*)

Daniel D. Gibson

University of Alaska Museum, Fairbanks, Alaska 99775-6960, U.S.A.

*Abstract.*—The American Ornithologists' Union's (1910, 1931, 1957, 1983, 1998) inference that the type locality of *Chen canagica* (Sewastianoff, 1802) is Kanaga Island, Aleutian Islands, misinterprets the author's arcane reference to Kodiak Island and overlooks a published 19th-century explanation thereof.

His curiosity about the specific epithet of the Emperor Goose and his knowledge of southwestern Alaska led Turner (1886:143) to explain long ago that Sewastianoff (1802:349) had doubtless been referring not to Kanaga Island, Aleutians, but to Kodiak Island as *l'Isle Canaga ou Kyktak*, "one of the Aleutian [sic] Islands nearest the North American coasts and situated behind the Alaska Peninsula" (*une des Iles Aléoutes les plus proches des cotes de l'Amerique septentrionale, et situé derriere le Cap. Aliazka*)—cf. Stresemann (1950:127). Even though Kodiak Island (57°N, 153°W) lies 600 km from the Aleutians—the 1800-km chain of islands separating the Bering Sea from the North Pacific Ocean—it has never been unusual for islands as far east and north as Kodiak to be referred to as part of the Aleutians, probably because of shared inhospitable weather and seas and treeless landscape. (For an example of this association preserved in avian nomenclature, note that *Sterna aleutica* Baird, 1869 was named and described from a Kodiak Island holotype.) Kanaga Island (51°N, 177°W) lies in the central Aleutians, 1000 km from "the North American coasts."

Sewastianoff (loc. cit.) formed his name for the island (Canaga) as well as his specific epithet for the Emperor Goose (*canagica*) from "*Caniagues ou Canagues*," as he stated the island's people were called (*le nom de l'espece, c'est a dire Canagica, a été imposé à cet Oiseau du nom de la premiere ile, ou de celui des principaux habi-*

*tans de l'ile Kyktak appelée Caniagues ou Canagues*). Unmistakably the same word, "Kaniag" was, variously, the original Inuit name of Kodiak Island (Turner 1886:143) and the tribal name of the people of Kodiak Island (Bancroft 1886:224). With a single vowel change, today these people call themselves Koniag (see [www.koniag.com](http://www.koniag.com)).

The Alaska Native Language Center (ANLC) explained *Kyktak*, Sewastianoff's alternative island name, thus: "The name for Kodiak Island is spelled *Qikehtaq*. It means 'The island.' [Kodiak is Alaska's largest island.] The Russians wrote it in different ways, among them *Kyktak*, and eventually the extremely garbled variant Kodiak was adopted as the standard. The name Koniag, or . . . [Sewastianoff's] 'Canaga,' comes from Aleut *Kanaaghixh*, which is their ethnonym for the Alutiiq people of Kodiak Island, the Alaska Peninsula, and Prince William Sound . . . in short . . . [Sewastianoff] was indeed referring to Kodiak Is. and its inhabitants" (J. Leer, ANLC, University of Alaska Fairbanks, in litt.). Today the name numbers (in several spellings: "Kikhtak," "Kichtak," "Kikhtowik," "Kuktak") among 14 historical names attributed to Kodiak Island by the *Dictionary of Alaska Place Names* (Orth 1971:535). To that list can be added both "*l'Isle Canaga*" and the spelling "*Kyktak*."

No doubt misled by Sewastianoff's reference to the Aleutians, which were understood to form an important part of the winter range of the Emperor Goose, the AOU

(1910, 1931) mistook for synonyms the homonyms *Canaga* and *Kanaga* and first identified the type locality as "Probably *Kanaga* (or *Kyktak*) Island, Aleutian Islands," an error perpetuated thereafter as simply "*Kanaga* Island, Aleutian Islands" (AOU 1957, 1983, 1998). Founded in 1792, the community that became the town of Kodiak was the first permanent Russian settlement in Alaska, and as a focal point of exploration Kodiak Island became the type locality of more than a dozen avian taxa—the very first of them *Chen canagica*, which continues to reach its eastern limit of winter range in the Kodiak archipelago.

#### Literature Cited

- American Ornithologists' Union. 1910. Check-list of North American Birds. 3rd ed. (revised). AOU, New York.
- . 1931. Check-list of North American Birds. 4th ed. AOU, Lancaster, Pennsylvania.
- . 1957. Check-list of North American Birds. 5th ed. AOU, Baltimore.
- . 1983. Check-list of North American Birds. 6th ed. AOU, Lawrence, Kansas.
- . 1998. Check-list of North American Birds. 7th ed. AOU, Washington, DC.
- Bancroft, H. H. 1886. History of Alaska. 1730–1885. Vol. 33, in *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft*. A. L. Bancroft, San Francisco.
- Orth, D. J. 1971. Dictionary of Alaska Place Names. U.S. Geological Survey Professional Paper 567. Reprint of 1967 edition, with minor revisions.
- Sewastianoff, I'A. 1802. Description d'une nouvelle espece de canard et d'une varieté de l'huitrier, qui se trouvent dans le cabinet d'histoire naturelle de l'Academie Imperiale des Sciences.—*Nova Acta Academiae Scientiarum Imperialis Petropolitanae* 13:346–351.
- Stresemann, E. 1950. Dr. C. H. Mercks ornithologische Aufzeichnungen während der Billingschen Expedition von Ochotsk nach Alaska (1787–1791).—*Zoologische Jahrbücher* 78:97–132.
- Turner, L. M. 1886. Birds, Part V. Pages 115–196 in *Contributions to the natural history of Alaska*. No. II, Arctic Series, Signal Service, U.S. Army. USGPO, Washington.